

A GUIDE TO THE CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION PROCESS

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PREFACE

This publication attempts to categorize and summarize valuable and useful information in one publication. It was developed to provide you with guidelines in preparation for entrance into and career advancement within State civil service.

This guide describes the State civil service examination process and walks you through the different steps involved. It also provides answers to many questions about the examination process. To future enhance your promotional goals, it is important that you review the entire guide as each section contains valuable and useful information.

To obtain information about currently scheduled exams, visit the [Department of Water Resources](#) or [State Personnel Board](#) websites.

If you need further information, please contact Selection Services at (916) 653-4838.

TYPES OF EXAMINATIONS

The following types of examinations are used to establish lists of qualified candidates from which hires may be made. The examination type indicates who may apply for the examination.

Open Examinations

Competition is open to all interested applicants. You do not have to be a state employee to apply.

Open/Non Promotional Examinations

Competition is open to all interested applicants. You do not have to be a state employee to apply. Career credits (three points) are applied to the final score of state employees with permanent civil service status.

Departmental Promotional Examinations

Competition is limited to state employees. You must have permanent civil service appointment with the state department indicated on the examination bulletin as of the final filing date. Under certain circumstances, former employees of the state department may be allowed to compete under the provisions of State Personnel Board Rule 235.

Servicewide Promotional Examinations

Competition is limited to state employees who have permanent civil service appointment with any state department as of the final filing date.

Multi-Departmental Examinations

Competition is limited to state employees who have permanent civil service appointment with one of the participating departments listed on the examination bulletin as of the final filing date.

Open, Spot Examinations

Competition is open to all interested applicants. You must take the examination in the location indicated on the examination bulletin regardless of place of residence.

Departmental Promotional, Spot Examinations

Competition is limited to state employees who have permanent civil service appointment with the state department indicated on the examination bulletin as of the final filing date. You must take the examination in the location indicated on the exam bulletin regardless of place of residence.

Limited Examination and Appointment Program (LEAP)

Competition is limited to all interested applicants who have been certified as LEAP eligible by the Department of Rehabilitation.

EXAMINATION NOTIFICATION

The State of California uses several methods to notify prospective candidates of upcoming examinations. Among these methods are:

- Distribution of examination bulletins to various state departments, State Personnel Board (SPB) offices, and local Employment Development Department (EDD) offices.
- College recruitment. Job fairs may be conducted in college/ universities to inform students of upcoming civil service examinations.
- Presentations at job fairs and meetings of community organizations, as well as in educational facilities.
- Advertisements in various publications, including newspapers and/or trade journals.
- On-line communications. The State Personnel Board (SPB) maintains examination information via the internet. [California State Civil Service Jobs and Employment Information](#).
- Intranet and Internet.

EXAMINATION BULLETIN

Examination bulletins are announcements that provide applicants with important details and helpful information concerning a specific examination. Bulletins are color-coded to distinguish among the different types of examinations.

COLOR	TYPE OF EXAMINATION
White	Open or open/non-promotional examinations Anyone who meets the minimum requirements may compete in the examination.
White	LEAP (Limited Examination and Appointment Program) This testing program allows alternate entry into state service for persons with disabilities. Candidates must be certified by the Department of Rehabilitation to qualify.
Blue	Continuous testing Testing is done at various intervals throughout the year as needed. However, all candidates may only test once during an examination period.
Green	Open, Spot Examinations Geographic location(s) where the examination is being given are specified. Candidates must take the examination in the location shown on the examination bulletin regardless of place of residence.
Pink	Promotional examinations Departmental employees who meet minimum qualifications may compete in the examination. NOTE: Certain legislative or exempt employees who meet the minimum qualifications may also compete.

UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS

Description

The term **experience** means experience equivalent to full-time work (paid or volunteer), typically defined as 40 hours a week. If you work part-time, your work experience will be prorated. (Example: An applicant performs clerical work half-time, 20 hours per week, and applies for an examination that requires one year of experience performing clerical work. The applicant would need two years of half-time experience to qualify for the examination.)

Experience Requirements

The following descriptions relate to the typical promotional experience required in California state service.

The words **“performing the duties of...”** or **“experience in the class of. . .”** mean that you must have been appointed to and working in the classification for the specified amount of time.

The words **“in a position comparable to. . .”** or **“in a position equivalent to. . .”** or **“duties comparable to. . .”** or **“duties at the level of responsibility not less than that of. . .”** mean that you must have experience of the type and length of time in a class at the same (or higher) level of responsibility as the class specified.

The words **“candidates who are within six months of satisfying the experience requirement”** mean that you are allowed early entry to the examination process, but must complete the experience requirements before you can be appointed.

Education Requirements

“Equivalence to completion of the 12th grade” generally means graduation from high school. However, this requirement may also be met by the following:

1. Passing the California High School Proficiency Test.
2. Passing the General Education Development (GED) Test.
3. Admission to and completion of at least 12 semester units of college level courses in a recognized college.

“Equivalent to graduation from college” means possession of a bachelor’s degree from a recognized or approved four-year academic institution.

“Equivalent to graduation from college with specialization in or major in” means that you must possess a bachelor’s degree in that field or show completion of course work in the field sufficient to constitute a major.

“Possession of a master’s degree or doctorate degree” means completion of a graduate or doctoral program. Honorary degrees are unacceptable.

“Students who are enrolled in the last semester or its equivalent of course work, which upon completion will fulfill these requirements, will be admitted to the examination” means that you are allowed early entry to the examination process; however, you must submit evidence of completion of the required education before you can be appointed.

Note: Certificate of degrees, probation reports, letters of recommendations, etc. are not to be submitted at the time of filing for an examination unless indicated as a requirement for the examination.

HOW TO APPLY FOR AN EXAMINATION

State Application Form (STD. 678)

To apply for an examination with the State of California, you must complete a State application (STD. 678) form. These forms are available in all state department personnel offices, at the State Personnel Board (SPB), and at the Employment Development Department (EDD) field offices. Click [here](#) to download a copy of the State application.

Attention to Detail

Take time to complete your application thoroughly. Make sure that it is accurate, clear, and concise. Completion of the application is, after all, part of the examination process. It demonstrates your ability to follow instructions carefully and accurately. Review your application for accuracy, spelling, neatness, and legibility. Make a copy to review prior to your interview.

Your application must clearly show how you meet the minimum education and/or experience requirements of the testing class.

Final Filing Date

Submit your application by the final filing date to the testing agency listed on the exam bulletin. You are responsible for submitting your application on time. Applications must be **POSTMARKED** no later than the final filing date in order to be accepted into the examination. Applications postmarked, personally delivered, faxed, or received via interoffice mail after the final filing date **will not be accepted for any reason.** Faxed or photocopied applications must be followed by an application with an original signature in order to be accepted into the exam.

File-In-Person

If the bulletin indicates that you must “file in person” for the exam, then you must deliver your application to the location listed on the bulletin during the specific hours indicated. You must have photo identification or two forms of signed identification with you when filing in person. Applications mailed to the office for a “file in person” exam **will not be accepted for any reason.**

APPLICATION REVIEW

Minimum Qualifications

Once your application is received, it will be reviewed by staff in the Selection Services, Examinations unit to determine whether you meet the requirements for admittance to the examination. The requirements are commonly referred to as the “minimum qualifications” (MQs) for the classification. If you meet the MQs, you will receive a notice in the mail indicating that you are admitted to the examination and will be given information about the next phase of the examination (written test, oral interview, etc.). This process usually takes anywhere from three to six weeks after the final filing date.

If you do not meet the MQs, you will receive a notice in the mail informing you of the reason for that determination. You will then be allowed seven working days from the notice postmarked date to provide any additional information that you believe may qualify you for the examination. It is possible that the information on your application was not clearly stated, was misinterpreted, or was inadvertently left out.

EXAMINATION COMPONENTS

There are a variety of examination components. For each exam, the selection analyst selects the one(s) that most effectively assess the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for successful job performance. The most frequently used components are: Written Test and Qualifications Appraisal Interview.

PREPARING FOR AND TAKING THE WRITTEN TEST

Prepare Ahead Of Time

- **Research and be sure you understand the duties, functions, and responsibilities of the classification being tested.** Your primary information resource for preparing for the written test is the examination bulletin. All examination questions are developed from the knowledge, skills, and abilities stated under the Written Test Scope on the examination bulletin.
- **Do not procrastinate.** Begin to review and study immediately upon filing. Do not wait until one or two days before the examination is given.

The Day of the Written Test

- **Dress accordingly.** Dress comfortably and try not to be distracted by environmental factors such as poor heating or air conditioning. You may want to take a jacket or sweater or layer your clothing.
- **Wear a watch.** Most examinations are timed. If you do not have a watch, station yourself so you can see the wall clock.
- **Give yourself plenty of time to get to the test location.** Arrive early and be well rested. Allow enough time for locating the test site, parking, unexpected delays, or heavy traffic.
- **Maintain a positive mental outlook.** Keep a positive attitude towards the test. You and your feelings about tests have a great deal to do with how you perform on a test. Try to keep calm, cool, and collected. Listen to all instructions carefully. If you are unsure of any instruction, do not hesitate to ask questions.

During The Written Test

- **Read carefully, work quickly, and follow instructions.** Do not assume you know what is wanted. Read instructions and each question carefully.
- **Look for key words.** Sometimes there are key words that will help you pick the correct answer. Some of these key words are: *best, common, usually, more, most, first, greatest, less, and some*. Beware of absolutes: *all, always, never, no, every, must, completely, entirely, absolutely, under all circumstances, at all time, and under no condition* (these key words usually indicate a “No” answer).
- **Pace yourself.** Most written tests are scored according to the number of correct answers. If you are having trouble answering a question, skip to the next question. Then go back to address the troublesome question(s).

- **Don't be afraid to guess.** There is no penalty for guessing. If you're not sure of the correct answer, first eliminate the choices you know are wrong. If you don't answer a question, you will not get credit for it. If you guess correctly, you will get credit.
- **Avoid changing your answers.** Your first impression is usually correct.
- **Finish the test.** If you are finished and time is available, do not stop. Review your answer sheet and make sure you have answered all the questions.

PREPARATION PRIOR TO YOUR INTERVIEW

Preparing is the key to success. The effort you put into preparing and practicing for the oral interview will help you to feel more confident and make a more effective presentation.

Keep a copy of your application and review it carefully before the interview. You will be asked to describe your education and/or experience relative to the testing classification and you should be able to state the breadth and depth of your experience and/or education. The panel does not have your application and will consider only information which you provide during the interview.

Study the examination bulletin and class specification. The interview panel will have both of these documents to guide them in evaluating your competitiveness to perform the functions of the classification being tested. Read the scope of the qualifications appraisal interview shown on the examination announcement. The scope identifies the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) that may be covered during the interview. You should also review the class specification and familiarize yourself with the duties and responsibilities of the testing classification. These are the areas in which you will be asked questions.

Be knowledgeable of the duties and responsibilities of the classification for which the examination is being given. Talk to people who work in the classification, their supervisors, and others who have knowledge about the work of the classification concerned. Show that you are genuinely interested in performing the duties of the classification.

Imagine that you are already performing the duties of the classification for which you are testing. Be prepared to answer the questions from that perspective.

Think through each Knowledge, Skill and Ability required. Try to think of the kind of questions you would ask if you were a member of the interview panel and how well you would be able to answer those questions. Try to appraise your own knowledge and background in each area as measured against the requirements of the classification concerned.

Do research in areas in which you believe your experience may be weak. For example, if the job involves supervision and you have no experience supervising others, some general reading about supervisory methods and practices may be useful. It may also be helpful to study departmental procedures or manuals.

Practice your presentation. Effective communication skills are the result of practice, feedback, self-assessment, and more practice. Participate in practice “mock” interview sessions with co-workers, family members, and friends. Through practice, you will develop the skill and confidence necessary to be successful in the interview process. During the interview, the panel will be assessing not only what you say, but how you say it. The best way to assure you will create an impression of poise and confidence is to feel that way.

During your interview practice efforts, remember:

Put your best foot forward.

Think positive. Remember, you requested and were granted this opportunity to prove your readiness to take the examination.

Be natural. Be enthusiastic and confident. Smile, relax, and use your hands naturally. The interview panel is interested in an honest and positive presentation.

Speak clearly and make sure that everyone can understand you. As you speak, articulate your words clearly. Keep your department’s technical terminology, abbreviations, and acronyms out of your replies. Some members of the panel will probably not understand what you mean. If you have to explain a technical point, do so in the simplest way possible.

Do not use slang or use words improperly. Many good replies have been weakened by the injection of slang or other language faults.

Get a Good Night’s Sleep and Watch your General Health and Mental Attitude.

You will want a clear head at the interview. Take care of any cold or other minor ailments. Do not take any stimulants or medication before your interview unless it has been prescribed by your doctor and you are sure it won’t have a detrimental effect on your presentation.

EXAMINATION INTERVIEW

The Interview

The State Personnel Board is responsible for insuring that the selection process is void of discrimination or bias. Members of oral examination panels must conduct interviews that pursue a line of questioning that is job related and contributes to the objectivity of the interview process. The following is a list of candidate's rights during the examination interview:

- **Right to a complete interview.** Every candidate should receive a complete interview. All questions must be covered.
- **Right to confidentiality.** All discussions about candidates are confidential and must remain solely among the interview panel members.
- **Right to a job-related interview.** Each candidate should be questioned and rated solely on the ability to perform the job effectively, based on what is presented during the interview.
- **Right to reasonable accommodation.** A candidate with a disability has the right to request and receive reasonable accommodation to enable him/her to participate. If the panel has not been notified of the need for special arrangements before the interview, the interview chairperson should reschedule the interview to accommodate the special needs of the candidate.
- **Right to be rated on the same scale as all other candidates.** Every candidate has the right to be rated solely on standard job-related factors with no consideration for race, color, religion, sex, age, ancestry, sexual orientation, disability, past or present military status, or any other non job-related factors.
- **Right to challenge a panel member.** If a competitor believes an impartial interview from a panel member is not possible due to past or present relationships or conflicts, the competitor may challenge that panel member, requesting removal from the interview process.
- **Right to appeal.** Competitors who wish to appeal the results of their examinations must file a written appeal with the Appeals Division of the State Personnel Board within 30 days after exam results are mailed.

The Panel

The identities of the panel members are kept confidential until the first day of interviews.

The interview is conducted by a two or three member panel comprised of a chairperson (who has been trained and certified by the State Personnel Board), one or two state service representatives who serve as technical experts, and, possibly, an outside public member. The chairperson has been trained to make sure that the interviews are administered in a fair and equitable manner, and the state service representatives usually work in the program area where the classification is used and are considered experts in the field. A public member is someone from the community who is knowledgeable about the classification being tested and/or about the community from which many applicants have been recruited.

The panel will conduct the interview according to instructions and standards prescribed by the State Personnel Board. The interview panel has the responsibility of assessing candidate qualifications for a specific job classification in the most objective manner possible. The interview panel will administer the same interview to all candidates (i.e. ask all candidates the same questions in the same order; use the same scoring criteria for all candidates). If you believe that one of the panel members may be biased against you or your qualifications, you may ask that member to withdraw PRIOR to your interview. You will be asked to state the reasons for your beliefs. If your reasons are sound, the challenged panel member will withdraw and will not participate in the evaluation of your qualifications.

The Day of your Interview

Personal appearance is important. You are not given a score for appearance, manners, or expressions. However, they are important in determining the interview panel's overall impression of you. Give careful attention to your personal appearance. Dress your best.

Do not bring copies of your application/resume or other materials such as awards, letters of recommendation, etc. to your interview unless you are specifically instructed to do so.

Do not bring note cards or other material to use during your interview unless you are specifically advised in advance that you may do so.

Give yourself plenty of time to get to the interview. Plan to arrive somewhat ahead of the scheduled time, particularly if you are unsure of the location. In any event, try to relax and compose yourself. Remember that even the calmest, most self-assured people are usually somewhat nervous before an interview.

When you arrive at the interview location, note the names of the panel members for your interview. Names and titles are usually posted at the Receptionist Desk in the Personnel Office. For future reference, you will want to remember who was on your interview panel.

During the Interview

When your turn for the interview comes, you will be greeted by the chairperson, who will escort you to the interview room. There you will be introduced to the other panel members and asked to take a seat.

The chairperson will explain the interview procedures. You will notice that your interview is being recorded. The recording is now required by law. The chairperson will inform you of how much time you will be allowed for your interview. Allocate your time wisely in thoroughly responding to the questions.

The interview is now under way. The panel members will ask you pre-determined structured questions that were developed from the knowledge and abilities stated under the Scope on the examination bulletin. The structured questions are used to evaluate your potential to perform the duties of the classification for which you are testing. You will be given a copy of the structured questions to follow along as the panel member reads the question to you.

As the Interview Proceeds:

Remember that the interview panel's job is to help you do your best. Panel members are obligated to make a fair and impartial appraisal of each candidate. The panel members will create a comfortable interview environment.

Be attentive. Maintain good eye contact with the panel members and listen carefully throughout the interview. When a panel member is presenting a problem or a question, give that person your undivided attention; address your reply to that person but do not exclude eye contact with the other members of the panel. Remember to speak clearly and loudly enough. If you communicate in this way, you will show the panel that you are well prepared for the interview.

Do not apologize for your weaknesses. Keep your attitude enthusiastic and confident. Try to bring out your strong points. If you are not reasonably confident that you can do the job, do not expect the interview panel to be confident either.

Be comfortable but do not lounge or sprawl. Seat yourself appropriately. Do not fuss with your clothing, pencil, or any other papers you might bring. Your hands may occasionally be useful to emphasize a point, but do not let your hands detract from your presentation by becoming a point of distraction.

Be pleasant but do not wisecrack or initiate extensive small talk. This is a business situation and your attitude should show that you consider it as such. Further, the interview panel's time is limited; the panel does not want to waste it, and neither should you. However, participate appropriately if a panel member chooses to make small talk at the beginning of the interview to make you feel more comfortable.

Do not dominate the interview. Let the interview panel do its job. Do not assume that you have to do all the talking. Realize that the panel has a number of questions to ask of each candidate. Do not try to take up all the interview time by showing off your extensive knowledge.

Imagine that you are already performing the duties of the classification for which you are testing. Answer the questions from that perspective.

Reply promptly and keep your replies short. If you want to offer an illustration from your personal experience, be brief and make sure your point relates to the question. It is acceptable to pause for a couple of seconds before answering. A brief answer is proper as long as it is complete.

Closing your interview. Remember to thank the panel for their time and consideration and exit professionally. If it seems appropriate to shake hands with the members of the interview panel, it is fine to do so. If it would be awkward or uncomfortable for you, then you would probably be better off not to do it.

Scoring

After you leave the interview room, the panel will review, evaluate, and measure your responses to the structured interview questions against competitive rating standards that were developed for the examination and assign you an overall score. If you have previously taken an exam for the same classification, your rating this time may be either higher or lower than before. Such a change may be due to differences in the type of examination and/or questions given, rating criteria used, or changes in the presentation of your qualifications for the interview.

If your responses to the interview questions do not fall within the passing category of the rating standards, the panel will assign you a disqualifying score (65%). Disqualification in one examination does not lessen your chances in the future. In fact, the experience you have gained in the examination process may be very useful in long-range planning for your career.

EXAMINATION RESULTS

You will receive a notice with your examination results within six to eight weeks from the date the examination was completed. If you are successful in the examination, you have obtained list eligibility. Placement on an employment list does not guarantee job appointment. The department that examined and established this eligible list may use the list to make hires. An examination does not necessarily mean that there are existing vacancies, but the examination was conducted to establish an eligible list from which hires for future vacancies may be made.

Term of Eligibility. You will remain eligible for state employment in the classification being tested as long as the employment list on which your name appears is in existence or until you are appointed from the list, whichever comes first. The life of the employment list is indicated on each examination announcement.

When a vacancy does occur, candidates in the top three ranks on the list may be contacted to determine their interest in the vacant position. Answer all employment inquiries within the time frame established. Generally, those candidates interested in the position are scheduled for a hiring interview and a selection may be made from among the interested group of eligible candidates.

Waivers. In the event you are offered temporary or permanent employment which you find impossible to accept or in which you are not interested, you may waive the appointment. Candidates on open lists are permitted three waivers of appointment to positions in any given class, after which their names are permanently removed from the list for that class. You have unlimited waivers on a promotional list. Avoid waivers and possible loss of eligibility by advising the testing office immediately of:

- a) Changes in your address; or
- b) Changes of locations where you will accept employment; or
- c) Whether you will accept permanent; or
- d) Temporary employment.

Inactive status. Circumstances may develop which make it impossible for you to accept State employment. In this event, you must write to the testing department and request that your name be placed inactive, providing the list is still in existence.

EXAMINATION APPEAL PROCESS

If you believe you have been disadvantaged in some way during the examination process, i.e., the minimum qualifications for the classification were misinterpreted, or your score was the result of fraud, discrimination, or other improper acts or circumstances, you have the right to file a written appeal with the State Personnel Board (SPB).

The SPB has indicated that the following are **NOT** considered valid reasons for an appeal unless accompanied by significant evidence of fraud, discrimination or other improper acts.

- The interview panel did not include a member from the SPB or from outside of State civil service.
- You were not informed that the interview would be tape recorded or a recording of the interview was not made or was inaudible.
- You believe the job performance information written about you by managerial staff warrant a higher score than you received.
- You received a low or disqualifying score in the examination after being more successful in a prior examination.
- You did not challenge a panel member's participation because you thought you would be rated unfairly, but after receiving your score, you believe you were rated unfairly.

You may also request to listen to your examination interview tape. Requests must be submitted within 30 days of the postmark date on the envelope containing your notice of examination results, to coincide with the 30 day requirement for submitting appeals to the State Personnel Board. All requests to listen to examination interview tapes must be submitted in writing to:

Department of Water Resources
Selection Services Section
1416 Ninth Street, Room 320
Sacramento, CA 95814

Please include your name, examination title and date of interview in your letter. You will be contacted with a date and time to review your interview tape. A Selection Services staff member will be present while you listen to the interview tape. For security purposes, note taking of any sort will not be allowed and copies of examination interview tapes will not be provided.

Formal Procedures

If you are unable to resolve your concerns regarding the examination, you may wish to file a written appeal. Your appeal must contain the examination title, the name of the department, the final filing date and the postmark date on the envelope containing your notice of examination results. If you file an appeal based on rejection of your application not meeting the minimum qualifications for a classification, you must also state why you believe your experience and/or education meets the minimum qualifications.

When to File

Your appeal must be filed within 30 days of the postmark date on the envelope that contains your notice of examination results.

Where to File:

State Personnel Board
Appeals Division
801 Capitol Mall
P.O. Box 944201
Sacramento, CA 94244-2010

Your appeal will be reviewed by the SPB. Most examination appeals involve a review or investigation by SPB staff, and/or informal hearings before an appeal panel comprised of designated SPB managers and subject matter experts. If your appeal concerns your interview, the SPB may, as part of their investigation, review the recording of your interview to determine if your interview was fair and equitable. At the conclusion of its investigation, the SPB will make a decision to sustain or reject your appeal. The department will abide by the SPB's decision.